

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 25, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health, and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health, and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

Thank you for your continued bipartisan support of the Department of Education's (ED) Open Textbooks Pilot (Pilot) for the creation and expanded sustainable use of quality open college textbooks to achieve savings for students. Your leadership in securing \$11 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 brings the total federal investment to \$35 million over the last five fiscal years. It is estimated that the projects supported to date will result in more than \$220 million in eventual savings to students—a substantial return on federal investment. We write today to ask that you continue to build on this multi-year federal investment by providing \$25 million to support the Pilot in FY 2023.

Unlike tuition and other costs of college, textbook costs are often felt by students on the front end. The College Board estimates that the average student budget at a four-year public institution of higher education for books and supplies was \$1,240 during the 2021-22 academic year. A single traditional textbook can often cost hundreds of dollars.

Open textbooks represent quality alternatives to traditional textbooks that are freely available to the public under an open license. Each time a faculty member substitutes a traditional textbook with an open textbook, students save money. Over time, the expanded use of open textbooks has the potential to inject healthy competition into the traditional textbook market—bringing overall prices down. Open textbooks also can improve instruction by providing greater flexibility for faculty members to adapt and customize materials to meet their specific needs.

Open textbooks not only help reduce the cost of college for students, but also can improve educational outcomes by ensuring students are not forced to forgo required course materials due to cost. A 2020 survey by U.S. PIRG found that 65 percent of students decided not to buy a textbook because of the cost and 90 percent of those students worried it would negatively affect their grade. Low-income and students of color are more likely to be unable to afford class materials and be negatively impacted. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the financial challenges these students face in continuing their college education.

That same U.S. PIRG survey found that 82 percent of students who reported missing a meal due to the pandemic also reported forgoing buying textbooks because of the cost. As colleges potentially face transitioning between in-person and remote learning with new variants and future surges, free online materials can help address resulting access issues.

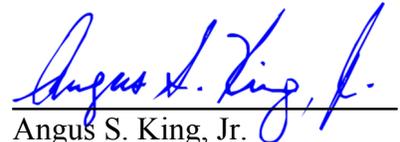
There is growing demand among the higher education community for this program. Over the course of the Pilot, ED has received 59 applications for projects while only being able to fund 16—just around a 25 percent. We believe an increase to \$25 million in FY23 is needed to keep up the exciting momentum this program has built toward increasing savings for students over its few short years in existence. Additional funds would support more projects and achieve more savings for a greater number of students. Previous federal investments in the Open Textbook Pilot show a bipartisan commitment to making college more affordable for students and families. We respectfully urge you to continue the growth of this commitment in FY 2023.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



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United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth
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Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



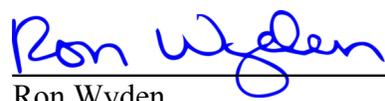
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



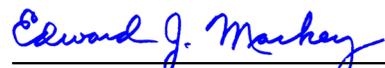
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Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



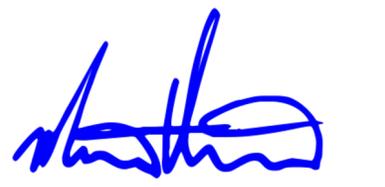
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Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
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